

## **FY2007 Grant Round Workshop**

### **Held on May 10, 2006**

Click [here](#) for a copy of the [FY2007 Grant Round powerpoint presentation](#) given for the workshop.

The following is a summary of the questions asked, and the answers given, during the workshop. They are presented in the order in which they were asked, so please be patient as they tend to bounce between both grant programs, and general requirements.

**Please check back here as additional questions and answers will be posted throughout the grant round.**

- Q: The application form states that the applicant community must have a current "Open Space and Recreation Plan". Is that the same as an "open space plan"?
- A: Yes. Click [here](#) for the status of the open space plan in your community, or [here](#) to obtain the [Open Space and Recreation Planning Requirements](#) and companion [Open Space Planner's Workbook](#).
- Q: Does this grant round include the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund grant program as they have in the past?
- A: No. This grant round is strictly for Self-Help and Urban Self-Help funds only. The federal grant money will be distributed through a separate grant round to be issued later.
- Q: What is my community's reimbursement percentage, and how is it determined?
- A: The reimbursement each community is eligible for is calculated using the community's equalized valuation per capita decile ranking, and is calculated by DCS staff. Click [here](#) to check on the [FY2007 reimbursement percentage](#) allowed for your community. The maximum grant award is \$500,000 per project.
- Q: Is the \$500,000 maximum award allowed apply to each community, or to each project?
- A: It is the maximum allowed per project. However, funding for each grant program is limited. It is possible, although not probable, that one community could submit multiple applications, each for the maximum \$500,000, and be awarded the maximum for each project.
- Q: Our town's reimbursement rate is only 52%. Is there an appeal process to increase the grant award?

A: No, because the rate is based on community statistics that DCS staff obtains from MISER. The Reimbursement rate is based on the community's equalized valuation per capital decile ranking. The EVPC figures come from MISER and are updated every other year. DCS staff sorts the figures into a simple rank order from high to low, and then ranks them by decile order. Each decile has 35 communities, with the exception of the 70% decile which has 36 since Massachusetts has 351 cities and towns.

Q: Can "force account labor", or labor done by municipal employees, be counted as part of the local share?

A: No.

Q: Can the Commonwealth Capital Score from FY2005 be submitted?

A: No, but the score obtained in FY2006 may be submitted. If your community does not have an FY2006 score, please file an FY2006 application with the Commonwealth Capital program.

Q: What is "Environmental Justice", or an EJ project?

A: EOEA is committed to the principle that all residents of Massachusetts deserve equal access to environmental benefits and equal protection from environmental harm. To ensure our adherence to this principle, EOEA has issued an [Environmental Justice Policy](#) that targets environmental problems that uniquely affect urban, minority, and low-income populations in Massachusetts. The Director of EOEA's Environmental Justice program reviews each grant application and awards from 0 to 5 points to the project after evaluating the project's impact on EJ communities.

Q: The online application form is "fillable", but I can't save my form after I've worked on it. Why not?

A: The edited version of the fillable form, the one that you complete, can be saved only if you own a full copy of the Adobe Acrobat software program on your computer. Many of us use the free downloadable version which allows us to open "PDF" files, and fill them out, but not save the changes.

Q: The appraisal requirements state that if the land is worth more than \$500,000, we must submit 2 separate full formal appraisal reports. Is the \$500,000 figure based on the property's appraised value, or actual purchase price?

A: This is based on the appraised value. Please remember that both grant programs reimburse based on the approved appraised value, or actual purchase price, whichever is less.

- Q: Could an acquisition project cross state boundaries?
- A: No; Massachusetts state bond funds can only be used for the portion of a project that lies within Massachusetts.
- Q: Would a project that involved multiple sites need to file multiple applications?
- A: Perhaps, but it depends up the nature of the project(s) involved. If the properties are contiguous (they abut each other), and the project would assemble them into one new conservation or recreation area, then it should be submitted as one project. Similarly, if several park projects all focused on one element, such as providing spray-pools in 10 parks across the city, then it too could be submitted as one project.
- Q: If we've already acquired the land for a park, could we still apply to the Urban Self-Help program?
- A: The acquisition costs would not be eligible, since the cost was incurred prior to any contract with the USH program. However, a park renovation or development project could be a possibility, provided that the work does not start until the USH contract is in place.
- Q: Could the municipal vote occur after the application deadline of August 1, 2006?
- A: Yes, it could. It must occur prior to December 31, 2006. Project applications that include a successful Town Meeting Vote or City Council Order help show that the project is indeed a viable one. Remember that if a grant is awarded to your community, the state standard contract that is issued by EOEA must include a certified copy of the successful vote. Finally, if a vote has not occurred prior to August 1, please submit the draft warrant article or city council order for review by DCS staff. Sample vote language is provided in each application package.
- Q: Do construction permits need to be in place at the time of application?
- A: No – please refer to the USH application package for more details.
- Q: Are there other sources for loans for these types of projects?
- A: Please consult your municipal treasurer's office, as there are many state laws and regulations focusing on how municipalities may borrow funds. One often employed by Self-Help and Urban Self-Help applicants is M.G.L. Chapter 44, §8C which allows the community to borrow in anticipation of grant program reimbursement.
- Q: We plan to use funds from our Community Preservation Act (CPA)

- account. Does DCS view these funds as 100% local monies?
- A: Yes.
- Q: New to the grant round process this year is the requirement that the "Open Question Period" ends on June 30. How can we get questions answered after June 30, 2006?
- A: Please submit them via email to [Jennifer.soper@state.ma.us](mailto:Jennifer.soper@state.ma.us), or [Melissa.Cryan@state.ma.us](mailto:Melissa.Cryan@state.ma.us). Emailed questions and answers will be posted to this portion of our website for any applicant to review.
- Q: For the Urban Self-Help program, if a town has a population of under 35,000 people, but applies with a project that has a regional or statewide impact, would it be eligible for a grant of 52 to 70% of the total project cost up to a maximum of \$500,000?
- A: Yes.
- Q: Where can I find information on the definition of a "regional" or "statewide" project?
- A: The Urban Self-Help application form states that a regional or statewide facility:
- serves a regional population of 35,000 which reside within a radius of 25 miles
  - serves one or more urban area's residents living within one-hour driving radius
  - parking for 100 vehicles for regional status
  - parking for 200 vehicles for statewide status
  - access to a public transportation route
  - provides adequate comfort stations and potable water outlets
  - serves all age groups (for either regional or statewide status)
- Be sure to submit a [Usage Report](#) along with your application to verify the status of your project.
- Q: It would be tough to accommodate on-site parking for my project. Would DCS accept off-site parking as an alternative?
- A: There are occasions when providing on-site parking can pose more management problems that it strives to solve, particularly on more remote conservation areas. However, every site that receives DCS grant funding must remain open to the general public. If abutting land is held by a nonprofit partner, or is owned by the municipality and parking can be arranged at that location, DCS is likely to accept that alternative. Please remember that should that off-site parking area ever fall through, an on-site parking solution must be provided. It is good to have a "Plan B" in that eventuality.

- Q: What about providing a shuttle service between the parking area and the site, similar to what is done on some National Park Service beach sites on Cape Cod?
- A: As long as the shuttle service is accessible to people with disabilities, it is acceptable to DCS.
- Q: We plan to provide bike racks as part of our project to encourage alternative low impact transportation. Will we receive extra consideration in the rating system?
- A: Not at this time, but that's an interesting suggestion!
- Q: We are considering a land acquisition project that involves both protection of undeveloped open space, and a site for an affordable housing project. How should it be appraised if we apply for Self-Help funding?
- A: The DCS appraisal requirements would still apply, and the appraiser would also need to assign a value to the Self-Help portion of the property. This gives DCS, and any future auditor, a confirmed project cost. That cost is the basis for the grant award. The same applies if USH funds will be used to provide acquisition funding for a parkland and affordable housing "combination" project.

#### Follow-Up questions:

- Q. To acquire land, we need a municipal vote (Town Meeting or City Council). Should it be a simple majority vote, or a two-thirds vote?
- A. A super majority, or two-thirds, affirmative vote is only required if the town plans to borrow money, or if the land will not be under the jurisdiction of the conservation commission. So, Self-Help projects that require borrowing need a two-thirds vote, and Urban Self-Help parkland acquisition projects also require a two-thirds vote.
- Q. We have a 242 acre parcel that we want to eventually split into a portion for conservation purposes thus our application. Does the actual surveying and Planning Board approval have to be done prior to submission; and if not by when?
- A. The self-help award will only go toward the portion of the 242 acre parcel that will be used for conservation purposes. Therefore, the appraisal will have to assign a value to the overall property (since the town is buying the whole thing), and then just the self-help portion. This has to be done before 8/1/2006. Surveying can happen after 8/1, but prior to 6/30/2007 if your project is selected for funding. Not sure why you need planning board approval, you don't need it from my

point of view, but maybe you need it for the appraiser. If that's the case, and the planning board can't approve a subdivision plan by 8/1, the appraiser will have to go with professional judgment regarding what the planning board is likely to approve, and then determine how that likely scenario will affect the value of the property.

- Q. Does the Conservation commission actually have to ask for the application (as stated in the self-help step procedures) or can we simply download the application package from your website?
- A. The conservation commission is the applicant. The package is downloaded from our website. The application form is also downloadable as a separate file so that you can fill it out, print it, have it signed, and return it to us.
- Q. Does the Conservation Commission have to vote to get the application?
- A. The conservation commission doesn't vote to get the application; a majority needs to sign it – which probably means the commission may need to vote to take that particular action. But DCS just needs the application signed by the majority, not a copy of the commission's vote.
- Q. Project completion date: do we ask for a date or is it assigned by DCS? 2007 vs. 2008?
- A. All self-help projects must be completed by 2007, as well as all land acquisition projects funded through the Urban Self-Help program. The Urban self-help program also funds parkland renovation projects and that's why some of them go through 2008.
- Q. Does the Town Meeting vote have to be prior to the grant submission and if not when is the latest the Town has to have the money secured by Town Meeting?
- A. The vote does not have to occur prior to August 1, but it has to be done by December 31, 2006.
- Q. If a town has negotiated a purchase price **below** \$500,000 and using that figure as the basis for a Self-Help request, do I need to get more than one appraisal?
- A. If that one appraisal comes in **over** \$500,000, it does not trigger the need for a second appraisal; it is only if the **purchase** price is over \$500,000 that two appraisals would be needed.
- Q. Our property is in Land Court, will that be a problem?

- A. It depends - if you can close on or before June 30, 2007, then it shouldn't be a problem. If not, then it's a problem. Acquisition projects must be closed on or before June 30, 2007.
- Q. Appraisal question: our town is only wants a portion of the property for conservation purposes, and sell off a portion that includes a house and barn. Do we need to include the appraised value for the entire parcel, including the house and barn and then back out the property that is going to be included in the self-help grant?
- A. Only if the town is actually purchasing the entire parcel itself, and then selling off the house and barn. However, if you are working with a nonprofit conservation organization, perhaps they would be willing to "pre-acquire". The nonprofit could acquire the entire property, sell off the house and barn, and sell the balance to the town. The town would then just need to appraise only the "subject property".
- Q. Can the Town be reimbursed for the costs for appraisals and land surveys under the grant program?
- A. While these ancillary costs are eligible, recent policy has been not to include them as part of the total project cost. Saving a few thousand dollars each of the 20 or so acquisition projects in a year can result in saving enough money to fund one more project.
- Q. Can the value of the property that we accept without incurring acquisition costs be used towards the community's share of the project costs?
- A. Unfortunately, we cannot count the land value towards the project's eligible costs. The regulations for both the Self-Help & Urban Self-Help programs state that we reimburse the acquisition cost based on approved appraised value or actual purchase price, whichever is less. While the donated land may appraise at a substantial value, the actual purchase price would still be \$0.
- Q. The land we plan to develop as a park will be donated to our municipality, and the deed will be structured such that the current nonprofit owners will maintain an easement for approximately 30 parking spaces for their use during business hours. Then during non-business hours, parking on this dedicated parkland will be available use for park visitors. Are these conditions compatible with the USH program?
- A. DCS grant programs can work within the constraints of a situation like this, where there are pre-existing conditions. There must be adequate parking for visitors with disabilities at all times, and ideally a few spaces always available for park users. Simple and straightforward

signage would be instrumental in helping to explain the parking rules and to keep the peace between business patrons and park visitors.